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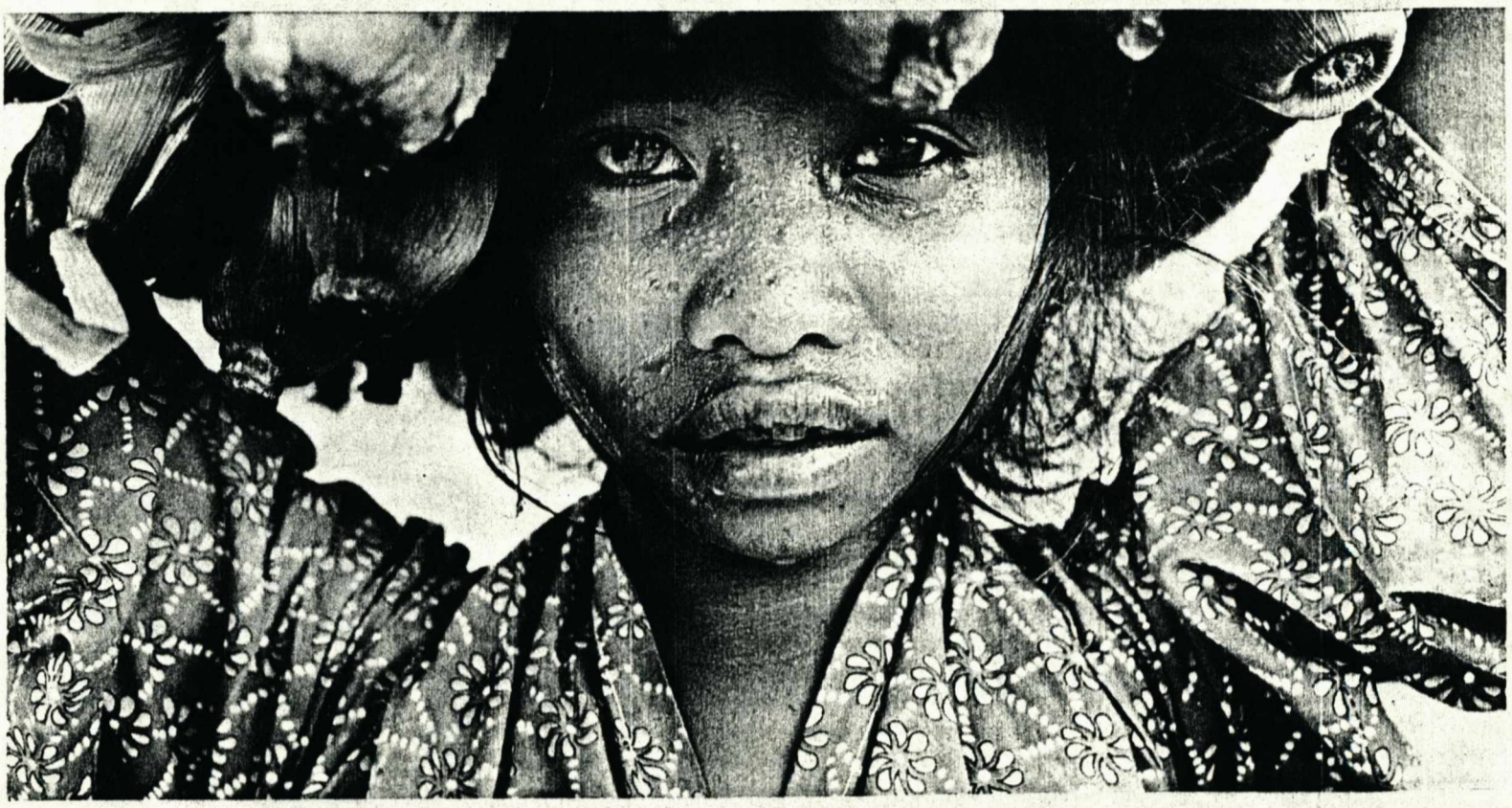
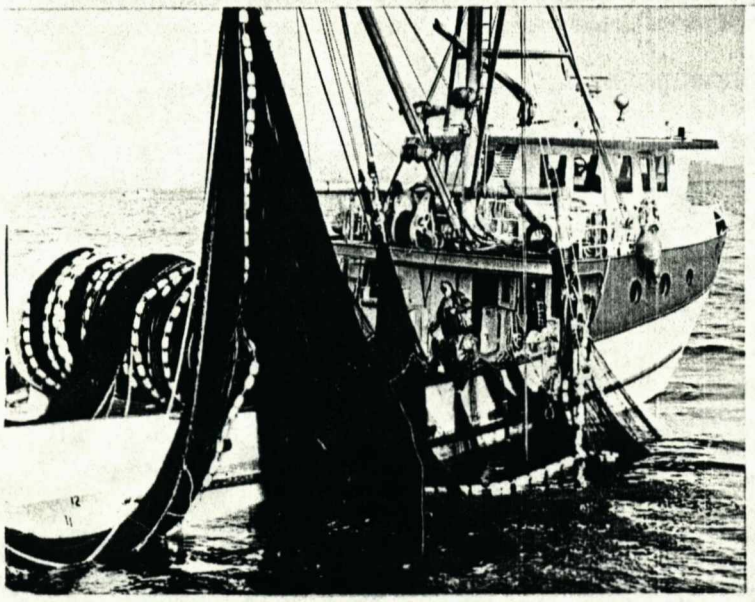
East Timor - Canadian Complicity in Genocide



Save the Georgia Strait!



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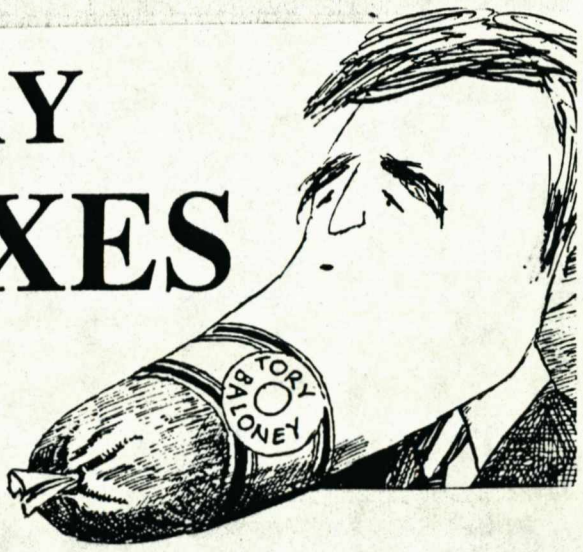
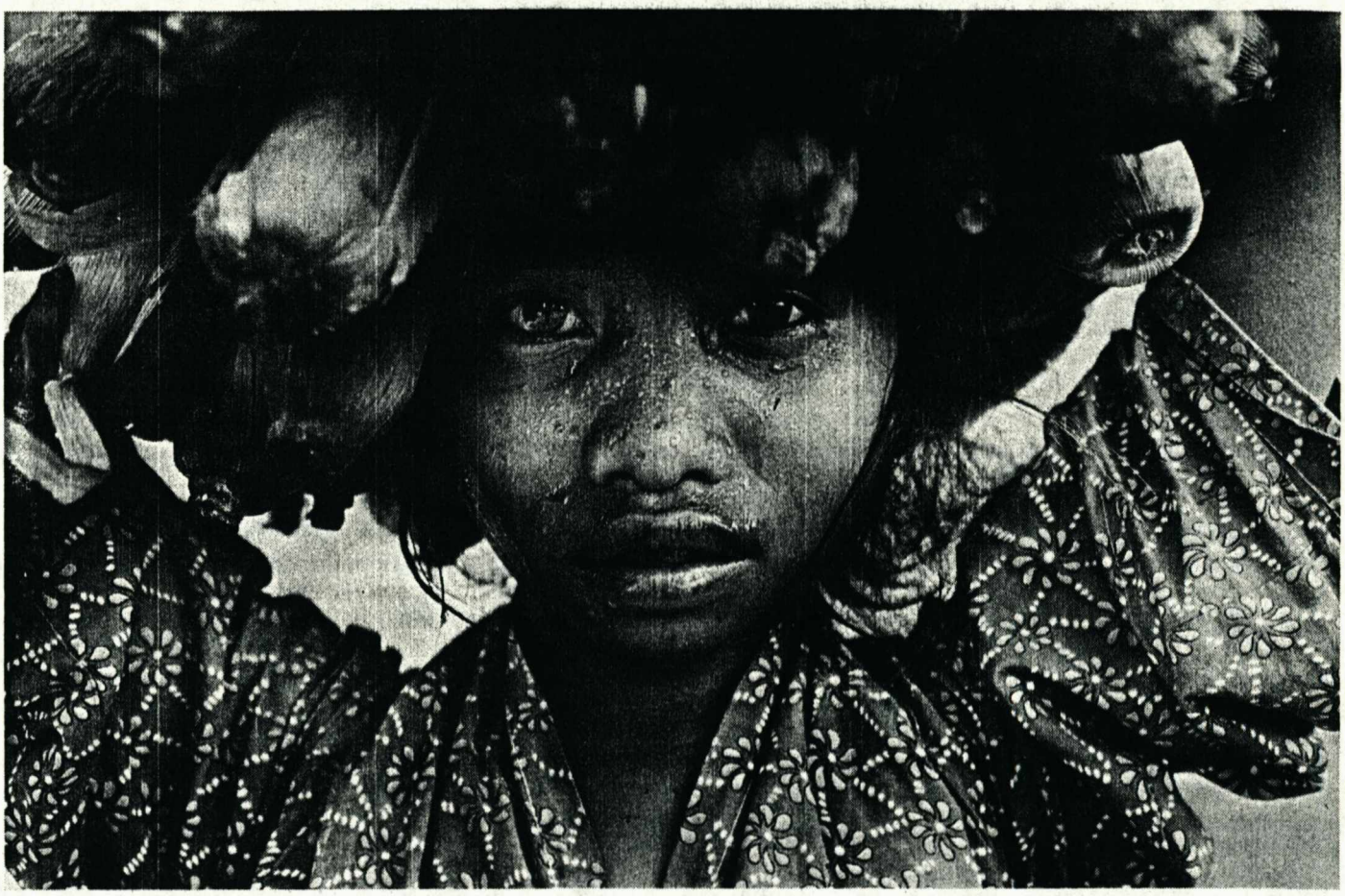


CANADA - PARTNER IN GENOCIDE

EAST TIMOR: THE SLAUGHTER OF A TRIBAL NATION



ELAINE BRIÈRE AND DAN DEVANEY

Less than 200 years ago, half the population of the planet consisted of nations of tribal people -- people who for thousands of years lived in harmony with the natural world. Today they have been reduced to 4-5 per cent of the global population. Most are forced to live on land that the state has found useless. The last of the environmentally rational societies living on the face of the earth continue to dwindle with the destruction of the environment as a whole.

This attack on small self-reliant cultures has been accelerated in the 20th century with the growth of the market economy. Anthropologist Jason Clay points out that "there have been more genocides, ethnocides and extinctions of tribal peoples in this century than in any other in history."

The destruction of tribal peoples has reached a grotesque pace. According to Bernard Nietschmann of the University of California in Berkeley, 86 out of the 120 conflicts going on in the world today are wars conducted by Third World states against indigenous peoples with the encouragement and support of the First World.

We hear little or nothing about these wars because western media and academia are firmly anchored in the state and seldom report the incursions by the state onto the lands of indigenous peoples. Trade ties supersede human rights in the frenzied attempt to expand the global marketplace and continue economic growth. Countries like Canada have allied themselves with genocidal regimes to this end.

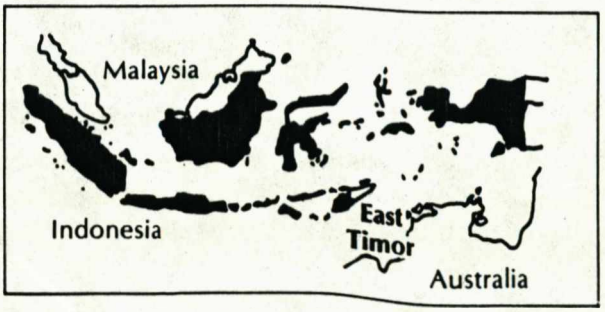
One of the most brutal examples of the systematic annihilation of indigenous peoples is the Indonesian invasion and occupation of East Timor. It is also an excellent example of Canada's active partnership with criminal elements on an international level.

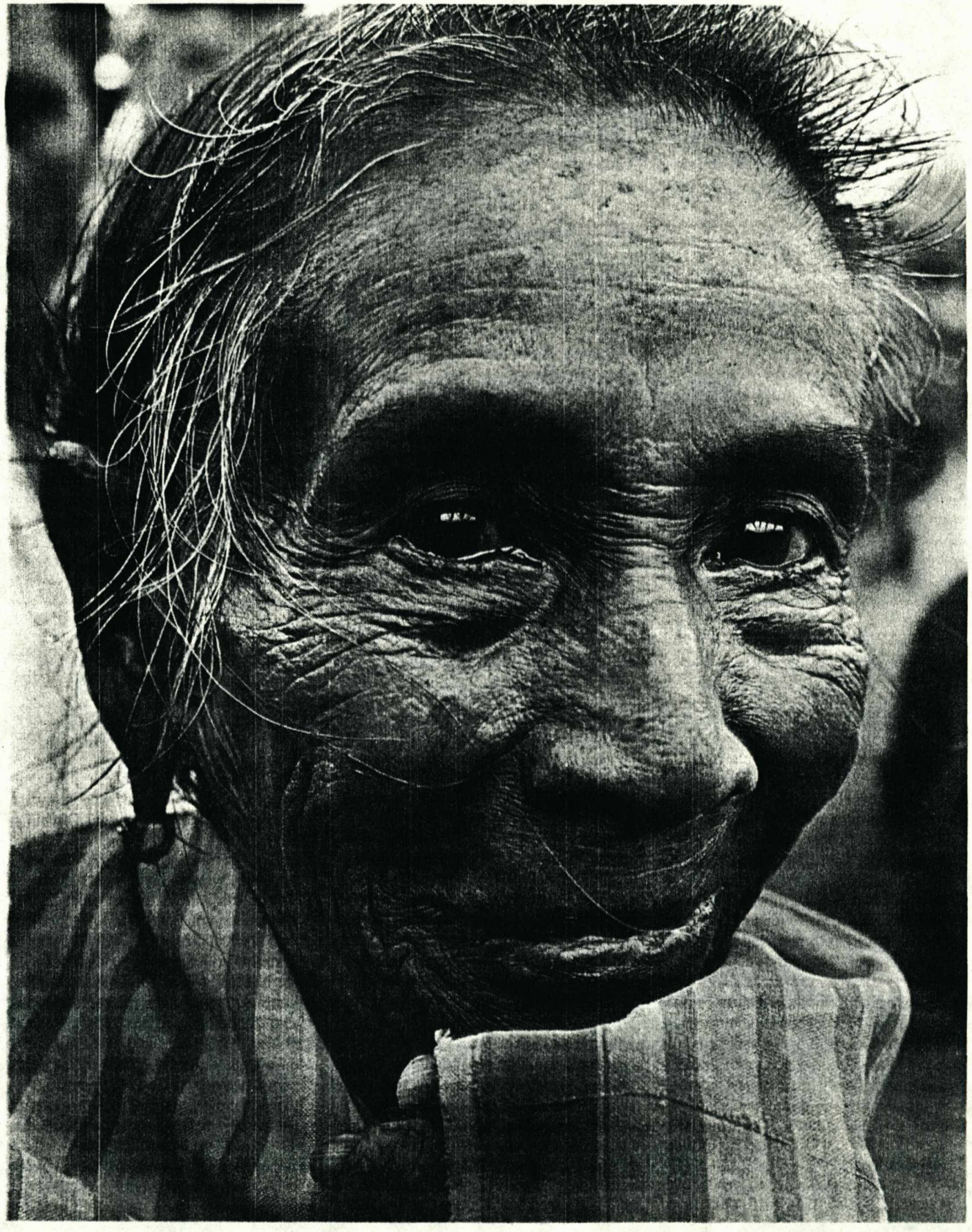
Canada is on very friendly terms with Indonesia which has carried out a program of genocide against neighbouring East Timor for 14 years. The invasion has been repeatedly condemned by the United Nations. Canada at first abstained, and now actively votes against any UN resolutions calling for the Indonesian military to withdraw from the small nation. Canada also actively works to have the issue of the invasion removed from all UN agendas, including the Human Rights Commission.

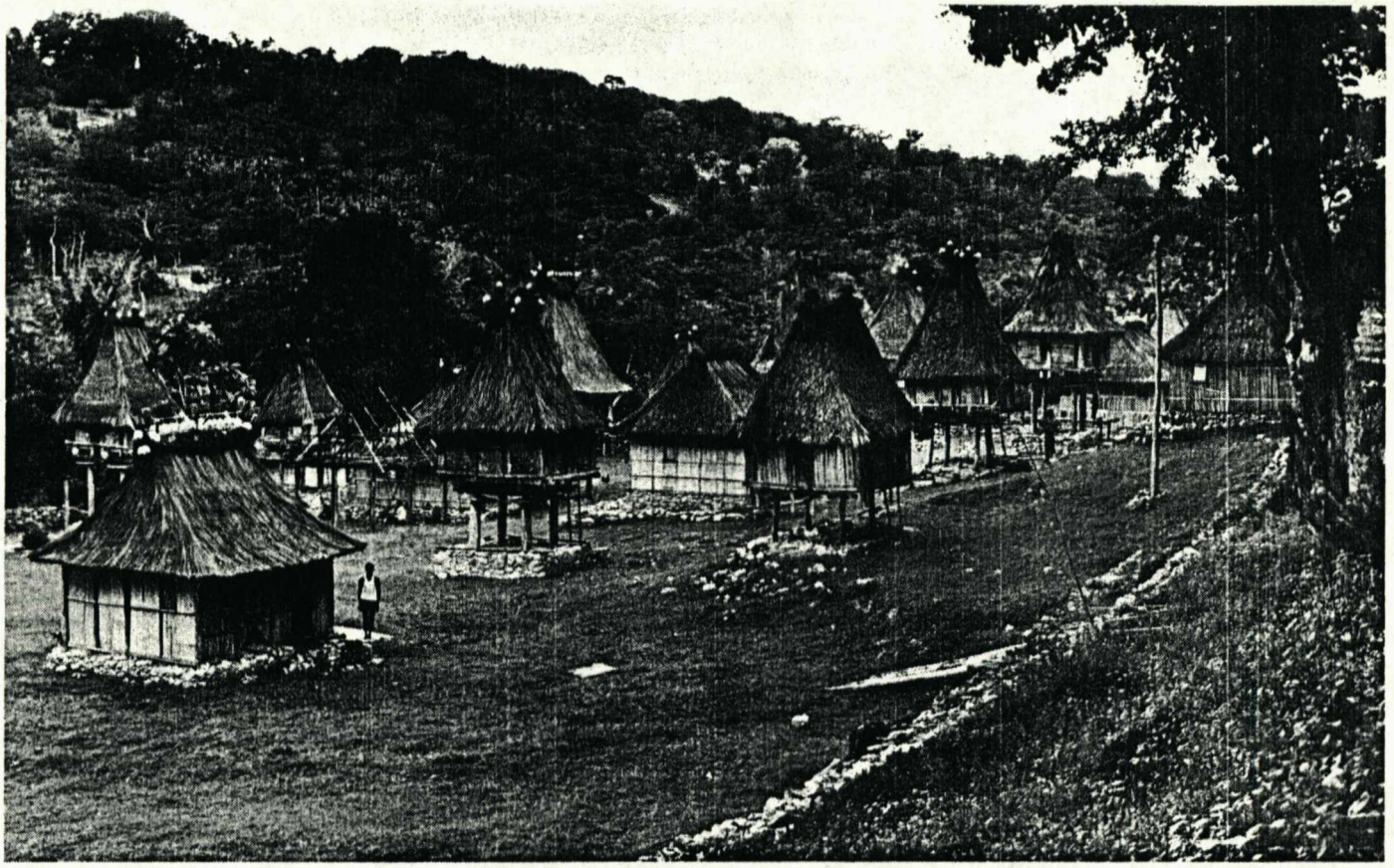
East Timor is located 620 kilometres northwest of Australia between the Indian and Pacific oceans. Tucked away and considered relatively irrelevant geopolitically by any of the major powers, the Timorese were able to maintain their traditional way of life as a backwater Portuguese colony. Right up until the Indonesian invasion of 1975 they lived in small self-reliant villages surrounded by gardens, orchards and jungle.

In anthropological terms, the tribal groups in East Timor are unique in their cultural diversity with 30 different ethnolinguistic peoples living on the eastern half of an island about the same size as Vancouver Island.

All of these diverse peoples base their traditional way of life on a strong metaphysic of nature. The Timorese believe the world is cared for by Father Sky and Mother Earth. Most religious rituals are carried out by women, considered to be closer to the spirit world than men.







Similar to Native American tradition, it is a Timorese maxim that everything that walks, flies, swims and crawls is a person. Even the rocks and trees are imbued with sacred qualities and stories. There is a sacred house in every village and a shrine in every garden to acknowledge the interconnected rights of all things.

A common belief in East Timor is that at one time all things spoke. Even the ground cried out when people trod upon it, and the trees and grasses screamed when they were cut.

Then Father Heaven imposed a ban of silence except for his human children and He and Mother Earth removed themselves from sight. As "speaking mouths" the Timorese believe that as humans they must thank their silent kin: the trees, the grasses and the grains and vegetables they grow.

The Mambai, one of the largest ethnic groups in East Timor, characterize themselves as the people of "the rock and the tree" and the Europeans as the people of the "book and the pen." They envision humanity as a tree with themselves forming the base or trunk.

It is the destiny of others to wander over the earth, "the tips and shoots of humanity," as the Mambai would put it, "but not the Mambai." It is their job to "sit with rock and tree" on their ancestral lands and make songs and offerings to the sacred springs and mountains for the well-being and fertility of all of humanity.

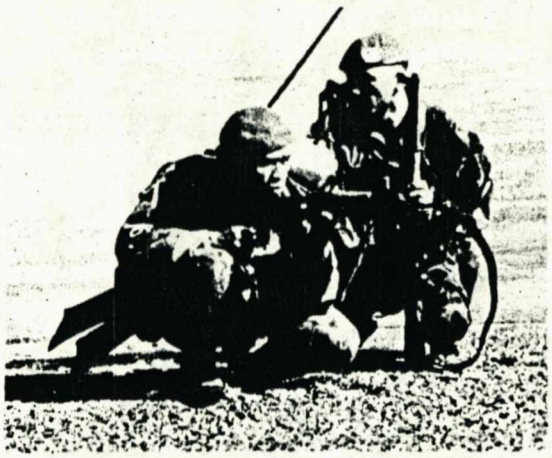
With the Indonesian invasion these traditional animist beliefs have been criminalized and many Timorese have turned to the Catholic Church, one of the four single-god religions allowed under the occupation. Unknown numbers of Timorese have been tortured and killed for performing their traditional ceremonies. The Indonesian military no longer permits the harvest rituals, the elaborate birth and death rites and other colourful events that characterized the village life.

However, the Catholic Church of East Timor has been the only institutional defence the Timorese have had during the systematic annihilation of their numbers in what has been described as equivalent to the killing fields of Pol Pot.

The perpetrators of this ongoing crime against humanity are virtually immune from criticism in most western countries, particularly the United States and Canada. Here in Canada we know little about one of the world's most consistent and flagrant human rights abusers -- Indonesia -- though they are our largest non-Commonwealth trading partner after the US.

Indonesia, to the north of East Timor, emerged as a modern state with the 1965 takeover of the country by right-wing generals who systematically slaughtered almost one million suspected leftists over a four-month period. The present Orwellian "New Order" regime of General Suharto rules with an iron fist and enjoys a favoured place on the western investment agenda.

Indonesia's invasion of East Timor began on December 7, 1975 -- just one day after President Ford and Henry Kissinger departed from an elaborate state visit with General Suharto in the Indonesian capital, Jakarta. As the killings increased into the tens of thousands, reporting in papers like *The New York Times* and *The Globe and Mail* dwindled to zero. These same papers reported heavily on the Pol Pot massacres. The number of deaths in East Timor was on a comparable scale to those in Cambodia, but received less than token mention inasmuch as they were taking place within the Western domain.



Left: Indonesian paratroopers.

Centre: Timorese youth slain by Indonesian troops.

PHOTOS: Canada-Asia Working Group

Two months after the invasion, General Suharto visited Canada and received a $200 million mixed aid package from the Trudeau government. At the United Nations resolutions were repeatedly passed, condemning the invasion and demanding an immediate withdrawal of Indonesian troops. Canada abstained.

Unshackled by media scrutiny or the criticism of western governments Indonesia used genocidal tactics, trying to wipe out the Timorese resistance, Falintil (*Forcas Armadas de Libertacao Nacinal de Timor Leste*). This resistance, a Catholic nationalist front of Timorese desiring independent nationhood under UN auspices, was labelled by the Indonesian invaders as a communist plot from Vietnam.

After taking over Dili, Indonesia launched an all-out attack on the civilian population in the rural areas. Low-flying aircrafts poured thousands of tons of phosphorous bombs, napalm and other ordnance on the picturesque villages scattered throughout the countryside. Survivors were herded into concentration camps where some 100,000 starved to death before international relief was allowed some access in late 1979 -- four years after the invasion.

The death toll to date is estimated by Amnesty International to be at least 200,000, one-third of the entire population. The armed resistance continues, with about 4,000 Timorese (not all combatants) controlling much of the mountainous interior with captured weapons against a well equipped Indonesian army of 25,000.

The vast majority of UN members recognize East Timor as a country that has yet to exercise its rights to self-determination; yet this right is still ignored because powerful countries like Japan, the US, Canada and Australia are lobbying against it. In February 1989 the Timorese Catholic bishop, Ximenes Belo, smuggled a letter out of East Timor reminding the Secretary General of the UN that the decolonization process had still not occured and asking the UN to hold a referendum in East Timor.

"We continue to die as a people and as a nation," the Bishop wrote. "For our part, we, the people of East Timor, think that we must be consulted on the future of our land."

Canada's position is that the Indonesian takeover, although unfortunate, is a "fait accompli." Canada is among the top 5 foreign investors in Indonesia, which includes 300 Canadian companies looking for cheap labour without the problems of unions -- banned in Indonesia.

Canada sells weapons to Indonesia for its wars in East Timor and West Papua, Indonesia's other colony. In the fall of 1984 external Affairs hosted an arms fair at the Mandarin Hotel in Jakarta to display the wares of Canadian arms manufacturers.

CIDA recently set up a program in East Timor called the "Canada Fund to the East Timorese." All funds are given directly to the Indonesian government which is rapidly replacing the East Timorese with Indonesian settlers. The priority development program in East Timor is the building of roads to be used by military vehicles. In the period 1987-91 Canadian aid to Indonesia is expected to reach $450 million.

Practically every major university and a number of colleges in Canada have foreign aid contracts in Indonesia through CIDA. Most of our aid to Indonesia goes to Canadian multinationals, engineering and consulting firms which help Indonesia create the infrastructure for "development" of the archipelago. This so-called development helps the Indonesian military maintain power and provides markets for Canada -- a cozy relationship. The trampled rights of the Indonesian people and the ongoing annihilation of the Timorese are secondary to this relationship -- thus our vote in the UN.

Canada plays a major role in sabotaging the right of the Timorese to a nation of their own. At the same time Canada is aiding and abetting the criminal elements in the international community, thus undermining the rights of us all to live on a planet in harmony.

Peoples like the Timorese are already good members of the planetary culture we must maintain and develop if we are to survive into the 21st century. Like tribal peoples the world over they have developed an artful incorporation of work into everyday life that incorporates pleasure, function, and art -- and is sustainable. They are proto-democratic in that they run themselves by discussion and consensus. And most of all, unlike so-called civilized peoples they live in harmony with their natural base.

By supporting the rights of the Timorese there is hope that we may be able to map out a sustainable future for ourselves in a just and peaceful world. If the small minority of the world's tribal peoples are allowed to be destroyed during the last gasps of the industrial age, the way to a truly civilized world may be lost.

Elaine Brière is a photojournalist and coordinator of the East Timor Alert Network, She photographed the East Timorese 18 months before the Indonesian invasion of 1975. Unless otherwise noted, all photos were taken by Brière. Dan Devaney is her husband.

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